

LONG ISLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 8, No. 1

Jan. - Feb. 1998

Alexander Hamilton's Trip Through Long Island in 1744

[Prologue. The following account covering the Long Island portion of a trip by Dr. Alexander Hamilton in 1744 is taken from a book entitled "Hamilton's Itinerarium," being an account of a journey through several states from Annapolis, MD to Maine and return.

Dr. Hamilton dedicated the original manuscript to his Italian friend Onorio Razoloni, in whose family it remained for over one hundred years, until it was acquired by William K. Bixby of St. Louis. He had the account printed in a book for private distribution in 1907.]

Tuesday July 10, 1744.

Early in the morning we got up, and after preparing all our baggage, Messrs. Parker, Laughton and myself mounted horse and crossed the ferry at seven o'clock to Long Island. After a tedious passage we arrived at Jamaica at a quarter after ten, a small town upon Long Island, just bordering upon Hempstead Plain. It is about half a mile long and the houses are sparse. There is in it one Presbyterian meeting house, one English and one Dutch church, a wooden structure.

We stopped there at the sign of the Sun and paid dear for our breakfast, which was bread and mouldy

cheese, stale beer and sour cider. We set out again and arrived at Hempstead, a very scattered town, standing upon the great plain. We put up here at one Peter's where we dined with a company that had come there before us.

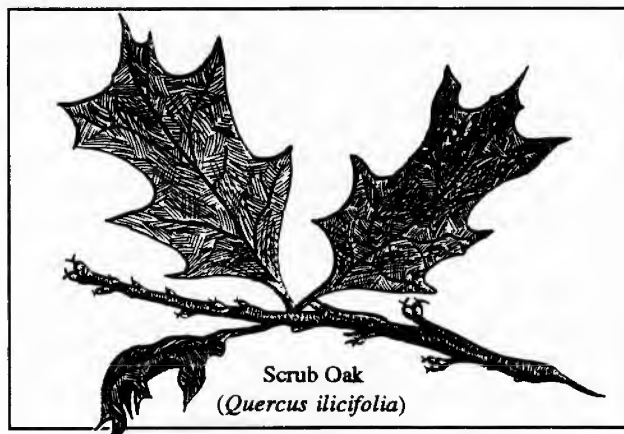
At four o'clock going across this great plain we could see almost as good a horizon round us as when one is at sea. It is about sixteen miles long and the ground is hard and gravelly, the road very smooth but indistinct, which makes it very hard for a stranger to find the way. There is nothing but long grass growing upon this plain.

Near Hempstead there are several pretty winding brooks that run through this plain. We lost our way and at last spied a woman and two men at some distance. We rid up to them to inquire but they were too wild to be spoke with, running over the plain as fast as wild bucks upon the mountains.

We arrived at Huntington at eight o'clock at night where we put up at one Plat's at the sign of the Half Moon and Heart. We had no sooner sat down, when there came in a band of the town politicians in short jackets and trousers, being probably curious to know who these strangers were.

Highlights

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Alexander Hamilton recorded possibly the earliest L.I. account of a "plain" dominated by "oak bushes two feet high" with "thinly scattered pines" interspersed throughout.

Among the rest was a fellow with a worsted cap and great black fists. They called him doctor, and Plat told me he had been a shoemaker in town, and was a notable fellow at his trade, but two years ago he happened to cure an old woman of a pestilent mortal disease, was applied to from all quarters, and finding the practice of physics more profitable than cobbling, he laid aside his awls and leather, got himself some gallipots and fell to cobbling human bodies.

Wednesday July 11.

We left Huntington at half after six in the morning, and after riding five miles of stony road, we breakfasted at a house upon the road, at the sign of Bacchus, then proceeding ten miles further, we forded Smittown river, otherwise called by the Indians Missaque. We baited our horses at a tavern where there was a deaf landlady. After a hour's rest we mounted horse again and rode some miles thro some very barren, unequal and stony land.

We saw the mouth of Smittown river running into the Sound thro some broken, sandy beaches about eight miles to our left hand N.N.W., and about twenty four miles farther to the northward, the coast of the Main of New England or the Province of Connecticut.

We arrived at a scattered town called Brookhaven, or by the Indians, Setoquet, about two o'clock afternoon and dined at one Buchanan's there. Brookhaven is a small scattered village, standing upon barren rocky land near the sea. In this town is a small windmill for sawing of plank, and a wooden church with a small steeple. While we were at Buchanan's an old fellow named Smith called at the house. He said he was a travelling to York to get a license from the Governor to go a privateering.

He showed us several antic tricks, such as jumping half a foot high upon his bum without touching the floor with any other part of his body. Then he turned and did the same upon his belly. He told us he was seventy five years of age and swore damn his old shoes if any man in America could do the like. He asked me whence I came and whither I went. I told him I came from Calliphornia and was going to Lantern Land. He swore damn his old shoes again that he had been a sailor all his life long and yet had never hear of such places.

We took horse again at half an hour after five o'clock and had scarce got a mile from Brookhaven when we lost our way, but were directed right again by a man whom we met. After riding ten miles thro woods and marshes, in which we were pestered with mosquitoes, we arrived at eight o'clock at one Brewster's, where we put up for all night, and in this house we could get nothing either to eat or drink and so were obliged to go to bed fasting or supperless. I was conducted upstairs to a large chamber. The people in this house seemed to be quite savage and rude.

Thursday July 12.

When I waked this morning I found two beds in the room, besides that in which I lay, in one of which lay two great hulking fellows with long black beards. I took them for weavers, because I observed a weavers loom at each side of the room. In the other bed was a raw boned boy, who with the two lubbers, huddled on his clothes, and went reeling down the stairs, making as much noise as three horses.

We set out from this desolate place at six o'clock and rid sixteen miles thro very barren and waste land. Here we passed thro a plain of six or eight miles long, where there was nothing but oak bushes two feet high, and thinly scattered over the plain were several old naked pines at about two or three hundred feet distance one from another. In all this way we met not one living soul, nor saw any house but one in ruins. Some of the inhabitants here call this place the Desert of Arabia. It is very much infected with mosquitoes.

We breakfasted at one Fanning's and near his home stands the County Court house, a decayed wooded building. Close by his door runs a small rivulet into an arm of the sea about twenty miles distant, which makes that division of the eastern end of Long Island called the Fork.

This day was rainy but we took horse and rid ten miles further to one Hubbard's where we rested half an hour, then proceeded eight miles further to the town of Southold, near which the road is level, firm and pleasant, and in the neighborhood are a great many windmills. The houses are pretty thick along the road here. We put up at one Mrs. Moore's in Southold. In her house appeared nothing but industry. She and her granddaughters were busy carding

and spinning of wool. After dinner we sent to inquire for a boat to cross the Sound to New London.

At night the house was crowded with a company of patched coats and tattered jackets. While we were at supper there came in a peddler with his pack, along with one Doctor Hull. We were told that the doctor was a man of great learning and very much of a gentleman. The peddler went to show him some linen by candlelight and told him he would recommend to him the best of his wares. We left this company at nine o'clock at night and went upstairs to bed, all in one room.

Friday, July 13.

We took horse after six in the morning and rid five or six miles close by the Sound till we came to one Brown's, who was to give us passage in his boat. Then we proceeded seven miles farther and stopped at one King's to wait the tide when Brown's boat was to take us in. The family at King's were all busy in preparing dinner, the provision for which chiefly consisted of garden stuff. Here we saw some handsome country girls, one of whom wore a perpetual smile on her face and prepared the chocolate for our breakfast.

At one o'clock we dined with the family upon fat pork and green peas, and having provided ourselves with a store of bread and cheese, and some run and sugar, in case of being detained upon the water, we put our horses on board ten minutes before three and set sail with a fair wind from the Oyster Pond. At three o'clock we crossed the Gut, a rapid current betwixt the main of Long Island and Plum Island, caused by the tides.

We arrived in the harbour of New London at half an hour after six and put up at Duchland's at the Sign of the Anchor. The town of New London is built upon the waterside, about a mile in length.

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[Editor's note: A copy of "Dr. Hamilton's trip through Long Island in 1744" was recently found by Mary Laura Lamont in the archives at the William Floyd Estate in Mastic. The question arises, "who was Dr. Alexander Hamilton?" If anyone has the interest and inclination to research this question, I would be very pleased to hear from you.]

American Basswood on Huckleberry Island in Western Long Island Sound

In response to Eric Lamont's article "The maritime oak-basswood forest on Long Island's North Fork" (LIBS Newsletter 7: 27-28), I would like to share my observations of American basswood (*Tilia americana*) occurring in small numbers in western Long Island Sound on Huckleberry Island (Westchester County).

The geology of Huckleberry Island is much different than at Peconic on eastern Long Island. There is a marine rocky intertidal shore (a rare ecological community in New York) along the periphery of the island, but no dunes. This bedrock dips down underneath the loam of the forest. There are several rather stunted basswoods at the edge of the forest on the northeast corner of the main part of the island and are thus exposed to the maritime forces of Long Island Sound. The forest here is mature and of a height typical of moist oak-hickory forest of the region. It would be more accurately called a woodland since much of the canopy has been opened by the highly acidic droppings of double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) nesting here since 1986, resulting in the death of many trees.

Concern for this damage led to soil testing on 18 May 1993 with analysis carried out by Theresa LoPiccolo Yap, formerly heading my agency's soil laboratory. Samples were taken to 12 in. deep: they were loam, including 42-50% sand, 42-48% silt and 8-10% clay; organic matter 11.7-16.7%; pH 3.48-3.67; nitrogen was extremely high; phosphorus was generally high; potassium trace to low; and electrical conductivity higher and perhaps stressful for non-salt tolerant plants under cormorant nest trees only. Basswood is considered a nitrogen-demanding species (Crow 1990), but the concentration may be too high on Huckleberry Island. The acidity was extremely high, with basswood normally growing in soils from pH of 4.5 to 7.5 (Crow 1990). Of course, this was after about eight years or more of nesting by cormorants and other waterbirds. Furthermore, the specific site of the basswood stand was not tested, so

we do not accurately know all the conditions of the site that led to basswood establishment or prior to the rookery.

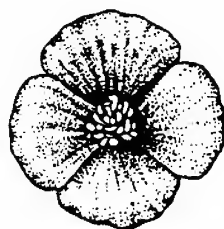
Other species on Huckleberry Island include white oak (*Quercus alba*), black oak (*Q. velutina*), northern red oak (*Q. rubra*), chestnut oak (*Q. prinus*), mockernut hickory (*Carya tomentosa*), sweet pignut hickory (*C. ovalis*), and sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) with lesser numbers of black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), Norway maple (*A. platanoides*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*) and black cherry (*Prunus serotina*). Some of these species were also mentioned in Eric's article. Trout-lily (*Erythronium americanum*) is an abundant spring ephemeral which is known to take up much soil nitrogen. Thus, it is likely that they improve conditions for the trees before the tree's roots become very active a little later in the spring. There are a few other species near the basswoods that I cannot recall. Sassafras is the only tree regenerating with 590 pairs of cormorants present on this 12-acre island this past nesting season.

While Huckleberry Island seems to host a more typical stand of basswood and is certainly not as unusual an occurrence as at Peconic, it may also shed some light on the tree's ability to withstand extreme conditions associated with saltwater - and birds.

Literature Cited

Crow, T. R. 1990. *Tilia americana* L. American basswood. P. 784-791. In *Sylvics of North America*. Volume 2. Hardwoods. USDA, Forest Service, Agriculture Handbook 654.

David S. Kunstler, Wildlife Manager,
Van Cortlandt & Pelham Bay Parks
Administrator's Office, City of New York
Parks & Recreation, Bronx, N.Y.



Plant Sightings

While botanizing one of his survey sites for the New York Metropolitan Flora Survey in the Brentwood area, **Donald House** collected an unusual species of *Viburnum*. **Steve Glenn** of Brooklyn Botanic Garden identified it as *Viburnum setigerum*, Tea Viburnum, and noted: "a non-native landscape species I've found escaping quite a bit on Long Island. There were no records for this species escaping in New York before we started this project, but now I think we'll be finding it much more in the future."

Betty Lotowycz and **Barbara Conolly** also reported Tea Viburnum from Caumsett State Park in Lloyd Harbor.

During the July LIBS field trip to the Bishop Tract of the Oak Brush Plains, **Thomas Stock & Company** found a California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) plant in full bloom. Thomas noted: "Our visitor from California reminds us that plants and animals can travel great distances and take root in new territory. There are many humans as well who have settled here from distant lands. It is when we leave our native habitat that we become an oddity. Yet we are all species among species, living on the same planet, using the same resources of water, air, and minerals from the soil. I wonder if any seed from the Bishop Tract will ever find its way to California?"

This past October **Steve Young** from New York Natural Heritage Program surveyed several rare plant populations on Long Island. Steve and **Eric Lamont** botanized the Shinnecock Hills and observed 12 individuals of silvery aster (*Aster concolor*); this is the only extant population known in the state.

The following day Steve botanized salt marshes in Jamaica Bay with **Steve Clemants** and **Bryan Dutton** of Brooklyn Botanic Garden. They located several species of *Suaeda* (the sea-blights, in the Goosefoot Family, Chenopodiaceae): *Suaeda linearis* and *S. rolandii* are both very rare species in New York.

Society News

Elections

LIBS officers were elected at the November meeting. The following officers will serve for a two year term:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| President | Eric Lamont |
| Vice President | Skip Blanchard |
| Treasurer | Carol Johnston |
| Recording Secretary | Barbara Conolly |
| Corresponding Secretary | John Potente |

Botany Classes

LIBS member **Mary Rose Ruffini** has been in contact with the Continuing Education Department at the New York Botanical Garden regarding the possibility of establishing a satellite campus on Long Island. A minimum of 50 people would be necessary to start this extension program. Mary Rose has offered to compile the names, addresses and phone numbers of interested individuals, which she will take to the CED office. If you are interested please call her at 516/744-9704 (evenings and weekends are the best times).

Illustrated Companion to Gleason & Cronquist's Manual

No matter how detailed written descriptions of plant species may be, there is no substitute for a good line drawing to confirm or reject a plant identification. An illustration is the next best thing to having an actual herbarium specimen at hand for comparison. And, yes, even professional botanists rely on illustrations to confirm their conclusions reached initially through the use of technical keys.

Four years in the making, the ILLUSTRATED COMPANION TO GLEASON & CRONQUIST'S MANUAL is based on the original artwork of the New Britton & Brown Illustrated Flora of the

Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada, published in 1952. But the new book is much more than a reprint - it has been completely restructured and richly enhanced to include new illustrations of several species not treated in the earlier work as well as many useful diagnostic details previously omitted from the old illustrations.

Edited by Noel H. Holmgren and Collaborators.
Publication Date: January 1998. 827 Plates of Illustrations. ISBN 0-89327-399-6. Hardcover. \$125.00.

To order contact The New York Botanical Garden Scientific Publications Department: TEL 718-817-8721; FAX 718-817-8842; e-mail scipubs@nybg.org

Thomas Stock announced the 1998 Long Island Nature Calendar is available at selected gift shops or order it directly from him. Each month contains a sketch or xeroxed photograph with an interpretive caption along with some historic or current facts about Long Island's diverse natural world. The design of each day-to-day box allows ample space to fill in personal nature observations. For details please call Thomas at 516/ 979-8323.

Winter Field Trip

28 February 1998 (Saturday), 10 am.
"Winter Weeds at Muttontown Preserve."
Leader: Lois Lindberg.

Identifying plants during winter requires a study in detail; bizarre fruits and dried flower heads often provide clues to a plant's identity. For details please call Lois at 516/922-0903.



LONG ISLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

Founded: 1986; Incorporated: 1989.

The Long Island Botanical Society is dedicated to the promotion of field botany and a greater understanding of the plants that grow wild on Long Island, New York.

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| President | Eric Lamont |
| Vice President | Skip Blanchard |
| Treasurer | Carol Johnston |
| Rec'd Sec'y | Barbara Conolly |
| Cor'sp Sec'y | John Potente |
| Local Flora | Steven Clemants |
| Field Trip | Allan Lindberg |
| | Tom Meoli |
| Program | Skip Blanchard |
| Membership | Lois Lindberg |
| Conservation | John Turner |
| | Karen Blumer |
| Education | Mary Laura Lamont |
| | Thomas Allen Stock |
| Hospitality | Betty Lotowycz |
| | Jane Blanchard |
| Editor | Eric Lamont |

Membership

Membership is open to all, and we welcome new members.

Annual dues are \$10. For membership, make your check payable to LONG ISLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY and mail to: Lois Lindberg, Membership Chairperson, 45 Sandy Hill Road, Oyster Bay, NY 11771-3111

PROGRAMS

13 January 1998 - 7:30 pm*

Member's Night, Bill Patterson Nature Center, Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich; show some of your favorite botany-related slides. Call **Skip Blanchard** at 421-5619 (evenings) if you plan to bring slides.

10 February 1998

Dr. Terryanne Maenza-Gmelch, Adjunct Professor, NYU & Barnard College,

**"Vegetation, Fire & Climate
of the Hudson Highland
over the last 13,000 years"**

Uncovering the past using clues from the pollen, leaves & charcoal in lake sediments.

Location: Bill Patterson Nature Center,
Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich.

*Refreshments & informal talk begin at 7:30pm, the meeting starts at 8pm. For directions to Muttontown Preserve call 516-571-8500.

LONG ISLAND BOTANICAL SOCIETY

c/o Muttontown Preserve

Muttontown Lane

East Norwich, New York 11732

